

OUR CITY. OUR FUTURE.

Planning St. John's @ Engage

Pilot Project Review



Completed by:

Organizational Performance and Strategy
June 2023

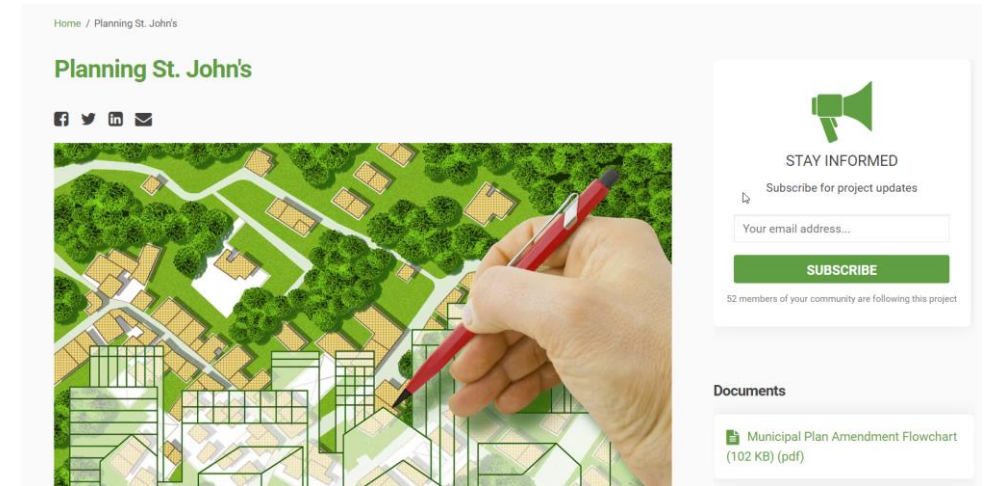
ST. JOHN'S

Background

- The Planning Division worked with Organizational Performance and Strategy (OPS) to create a Planning St. John's project page on EngageStJohns.ca as a one-year pilot project to provide a site where the public can find information and give feedback on planning applications all in one place. The site includes Municipal Plan and Development Regulation amendments such as rezonings and text amendments, but does not include development applications, discretionary use applications, or non-conforming use applications.
- The project was recommended based on feedback that it can be challenging for the public to find information on the City website for projects running over many phases and years. As well, a site such as this was recommended in the Engage! St. John's Task Force report and it is common practice in other jurisdictions.
- The pilot began in June 2022 and was intended to run for one year. A decision needs to be made on whether to continue with the project at the end of June 2023.
- The review sought feedback from the public and Council on how the pilot project worked to achieve its goals; it also included feedback from the City Clerk's Office, Communications, Planning and OPS divisions on the process.

The Pilot Project

- One [landing page](#) about planning was created and features on the [EngageStJohns.ca](#) home page and each new project was then added to this page with a link to a stand-alone project page for easy searching.
- Each page followed a standard look and feel with a visual/map, lifecycle showing the various stages of approval, key dates, who's listening, documents, follow project option, news about the project, questions tool, feedback tool
- Cumulatively, the pilot data shows 4,700 unique visitors to the various pages



Evaluation Methods

- Review of analytics on [EngageStJohns.ca](https://engagestjohns.ca) planning pages
- Review of communications analytics related to the project(s)
- Survey of registered [EngageStJohns.ca](https://engagestjohns.ca) users and potential users
 - Available on planning page on [EngageStjohns.ca](https://engagestjohns.ca) and open to anyone
 - Published on May 8 – open for two weeks – 92 responses
 - Newsletter send to all registered [EngageStJohns.ca](https://engagestjohns.ca) users and project followers – 3800 people
 - Promotion of the survey to all residents to check awareness of the page through the City's communications channels
- Meeting with Communications and City Clerk to get their feedback on the pilot, the process, what worked well, what was challenging, etc.
- Survey for Council
- Process meeting with Planning and OPS

Project Pages Published During the Pilot

- 110 Cheeseman Drive
- 110 Hebron Way/15 Verafin Way
- Text Amendment - Accessory Building
- Text Amendment - Residential Reduced Lot (RRL) Zone Driveways
- Text Amendment - Restaurant in Commercial Highway (CH) Zone
- 366-374 Empire Avenue
- 4 Merrymeeting Rd
- 801 Water Street
- 1274 Blackhead Rd
- 188 New Pennywell Rd
- 40 Quidi Vidi Rd
- 20 George's Pond Rd
- Text Amendment Heritage Use and Definitions
- 20 Janeway Place

Engagement Numbers by Project

Page	Engaged Visitors	Aware Visitors	Total Visits	Page Followers
Planning Page (landing page)	N/A	1800	1700	50
110 Hebron Way/15 Verafin Way	3	708	827	6
Text Amendment - Residential Reduced Lot (RRL) Zone Driveways	1	355	388	2
Text Amendment - Restaurant in Commercial Highway (CH) Zone	0	145	158	0
Text Amendment – Accessory Building	0	101	112	0
366-374 Empire Avenue	7	852	888	0
20 Janeway Place	5	478	568	7
110 Cheeseman Drive	0	188	215	5
4 Merrymeeting Rd	19	1100	1400	8

Engagement Numbers by Project

Page	Engaged* Visitors	Aware* Visitors	Total Visits*	Page Followers
1274 Blackhead Rd	12	899	1100	16
20 George's Pond Rd	0	250	288	4
188 New Pennywell Rd	2	397	445	6
40 Quidi Vidi Rd	0	199	208	0
801 Water Street	0	63	68	0
Text Amendment Heritage Use and Definition	4	159	206	2

* Engaged visitors interact with the page by leaving feedback or asking questions

* Aware visitors have visited the page and reviewed materials

* Total visits include all visits to the page including repeat visitors

• These numbers reflect data collected before June 15, 2023

Feedback from Communications about the Pilot

There was a soft launch of the planning page in June, 2022 going into summer

- Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Instagram
 - City Guide Article
- There was ongoing promotion of the page along with promotion of each new project that was added as consultation was open; although there was no automatic trigger for this to happen.
 - There was a communications staff change during the pilot which may have impacted continuity of communications about the project.
 - Should the pilot continue, a more comprehensive communications plan will be required as well as advertising and marketing to promote the page and increase overall awareness of its existence as well as how to interact and provide feedback.

Feedback from City Clerk on the Pilot

- The City Clerk process to prepare packages and send feedback to Council still works with the pilot in place, and it was the view of the City Clerk that the number of emails related to applications decreased as people had other options to provide their feedback through the project pages.
- Since the City Clerk will accept anonymous feedback on planning applications, it was suggested that staff look at whether feedback on the site could be done without a registration requirement. Extra questions could be added to the survey tool to ask whether people live in St. John's or in the neighbourhood.
- There is an opportunity to promote the planning page when replying to emails related to the applications going forward.

Feedback from Planning on the pilot

- There were some changes made to the process as the pilot progressed such as not publishing the new pages when they were going to COTW as Council could decide not to refer to regular meeting
- There are some systems limitations within [EngageStJohns.ca](https://engagestjohns.ca) which require staff in OPS to provide support such as archiving projects, issuing newsletters, etc.. So timing is key for updates for internal communications.
- A report package goes to Council before a project is closed so ensuring the lifecycles are current is important.
- The need for communications staff to get notified via email when an advertisement is ready – needs to be the trigger for broader communications about a new project or update on project.
- Overall, there is a view that reaching beyond the immediate neighbourhood for a project is good for feedback on land use planning.
- The beginning of the process works well; however, there are opportunities to improve the process at the mid-way point and as the project advances as updates may not be made or OPS is not notified of changes.
- If moving beyond the pilot, will need to make the process standard work and part of the planning application process overall to ensure all pages are current and archived accordingly.

Feedback from OPS on the Pilot

- Generally, OPS staff can continue to support the project.
- Planning staff need to provide a publish date in their email request when they ask OPS to review the page(s) – OPS can schedule the publish in the system
- For notifications to communications – need instructions to be included to provide clarity on how to promote the new project and ongoing.
- Reporting from Engage platform has rework currently for OPS staff. Planning and OPS staff need to review what is currently included in the report, and what should be in the report, to determine whether the report can be tweaked rather than having to recreate it.
- Data analytics show that the pages are seen and interacted with by nearly 2000 people which means the site has visibility.
- Should the pilot be continued and become operational, detailed process documents and clearly articulated roles and responsibilities, timelines will be required.

Feedback from Council on the pilot

- An online survey was provided for Council's feedback.
- 6 of 11 Councillors responded to the survey
- Overall, ratings of the planning page and reports from EngageStJohns.ca were generally positive.
- When asked about the times they use the reports, 3 of the respondents indicated they always use the reports from EngageStJohns.ca, 3 said they use them when a project is generating a lot of feedback from residents, 1 said when a project is generating a lot media attention and 1 said when a project is in their Ward.
- The majority of respondents (67%) rated the usefulness of the public engagement summaries and Engage reports positively.
- Half of the respondents indicated they had seen information about the project on social media
- One person indicated they had received positive feedback about the pilot.
- Respondents generally felt the pilot project was achieving its goals, but only marginally.
- Two of the respondents indicated the pilot should continue and the rest were unsure.
- When asked if there was any additional information that would be helpful to include in the information packages they receive, it was noted that the notes will often provide rationale for why there is opposition to a project, but it doesn't always include rationale for why there is support. Rationale from letters/emails related to support would also be helpful. It was also noted that the type of information included may be dependent on the type of project that the engagement is about.

Feedback from the public on the pilot

- 72 % of those who completed the online survey had seen information about the pilot project; 82% saw it through EngageStJohns.ca newsletters. Fewer than 15% saw it through other communications channels.
- While all projects had some level of awareness; the projects respondents were most aware of included: 20 Janeway Place (65%) and 110 Hebron Way (45%) and 4 Merrymeeting Rd.(43 %). 5% indicated they were not aware of any of the projects
- 85% of respondents indicated they found the newsletter sent from EngageStJohns.ca useful.
- N=92

Feedback from the Public on the pilot: features of the page(s)

- 77% indicated the documents on the pages were useful
- 60% indicated the lifecycle on the project pages was helpful; 16% said they did not see it
- 75% indicated the Key Dates tool was helpful; 11% said they did not see it
- 70% indicated the feedback tool was useful; 19% did not see it
- 59% said the Questions tool was useful; 22% could not recall seeing it
- 89% said that having all the information in one place was useful
- 80% said the project pages were useful in providing information and a means of feedback

Feedback from the Public on the pilot

- When asked to indicate how they typically learn about planning applications, 58% of respondents indicated they do so through sign up notifications, website or engage
 - 32% of people said social media
 - 25% said friends and neighbours
 - 22% said mailouts from the city
- When asked whether the pilot project should continue, 85% of respondents said “yes.” 12% said they did not have an opinion and 3% indicated it should not

85 % support
continuing the
project

Open ended feedback from the Public about the pilot

- There was general feedback that the site is good to have it; that they visit now and then to see what's going on
- Some people wondered why they did not see ALL city projects including those that are City lead on the site
- It was noted that definitions/glossary of terms would be good to have on the site; more everyday language
- Would be good to see concept designs before meetings happen
- People would like more time to provide feedback
- People would like access to map layers on the project pages
- There should be some type of follow up on the various steps in a process – updates throughout the application
- Some noted they did not pay attention to projects as they were not in their neighbourhood
- It was suggested to include a planners' summary, name of architect
- There is an interest from a few in having a historical listing of all projects

The public was asked: What is one thing the planning team can do to better inform you about planning applications?

- Send out notifications by postal code
- Inform on decisions once consultation has closed
- Less text, more visuals, clearly articulated impacts to the public
- Use social media to break down the steps
- Use areas of city in posts, i.e. East end, better clarify of the location
- Earlier notification generally
- Promote this project (pilot project) more
- Provide more characters for feedback in the online tool
- Advertise on radio so seniors will hear about it
- Advertise the EngageStJohns.ca site more
- Make information easier to find for those who are not tech savvy

Demographics from the Public who completed the survey

Location of respondents

- 98% of respondents were from St. John's; residents from all wards provided feedback
 - Ward 1 – 16%
 - Ward 2 - 22 %
 - Ward 3 – 10 %
 - Ward 4 – 24 %
 - Ward 5 – 10 %
 - 20 % were not sure which ward they were in

Age of respondents

- 46% of respondents were over 60 years of age
- 29% were between 46-60
- 11% were between 31-45
- 12% were between 18-30

Recommendations

- Continue with the project page and make it a permanent feature [of EngageStJohns.ca](#)
- Develop a comprehensive communications strategy promoting the EngageStJohns.ca site, the Planning page, features of the page, ways to provide feedback, and the various tools available on the page, etc.
- Develop a standard communications protocol for projects that go live including the promotions strategy and the process documents guiding the promotions
- Explore options to improve visuals/add maps/links to maps etc. to the project pages
- Explore and consider the option for anonymous feedback with the EngageStJohns.ca website
- Keep project pages up to date as applications move through the system and better use the newsletter tool to keep people informed
- Consider extending the timeline to provide feedback
- Schedule a Quarterly check-in meeting between Organizational Performance and Strategy, Communications, Planning, and City Clerk to ensure the project continues to meet objectives
- Streamline and improve the report from EngageStJohns.ca for Council
- Detail the process from start to finish and clearly articulate roles and responsibilities, and timelines required for all parties.